

MCC to add downtown presence

**By Annie Gentile - ReminderNews
Manchester - posted Thu., Feb. 9, 2012**

Manchester Community College plans to move into the former New Alliance building at 903 Main St. this May, adding a gallery, cafe, and entertainment and educational opportunities to the downtown area. Photo by Annie Gentile.

The former New Alliance Bank location at 903 Main St. in downtown Manchester is an empty storefront right now, but that's all soon to change.

Manchester Community College will be adding its presence to the downtown area, and expects to be moving in with a gallery, space for teaching courses, and a variety of programs by the end of May.



“It was an opportunity presented to us by First Niagara Bank,” said Ta’shema Odoms, program coordinator for the move.

With the recent buy-out of New Alliance Bank and subsequent layoffs, the town was concerned about a decline in downtown traffic hurting other local businesses, Odoms said, adding that First Niagara offered to pay for a market study of the downtown to see how things might be improved.

Odoms said one of the findings in the market study was that Manchester residents were looking for more arts, culture and music opportunities downtown, and this was a niche that MCC might be able to fill.

“There are three floors in the building, and we plan to primarily use the first floor for an art gallery to be open to the public, as well as an associated video gallery,” Odoms said. “There will also be three seminar rooms for various business and entrepreneurship programs and a wireless-accessible small café. We plan to bring the Mishi-maya-gat poetry series to the new location.” She added that the town is presently working with Manchester Adult Education to occupy some space on the second floor, and preliminary plans for a variety of health and wellness practitioners to have office space and workshops are in motion. “There is still a lot to discuss. It’s a work in progress,” she said.

Odoms said the college is also exploring establishing a regular open mic series.

“We have a lot of students in bands, so this would be a great opportunity to bring that kind of creative presence downtown, and give the students some exposure as well,” said Odoms. “For the past five or six years, MCC has been the largest community college in the state, so we thought why not bring some of our energy downtown, make ourselves more visible, while also bringing more foot traffic downtown.”

Odoms said the college doesn't want its students just to come into Manchester to go to school and then go home, but rather to stay and experience some more of what the town has to offer - such as restaurants and other shops and attractions downtown.

"This is a creative way to increase traffic, reinvigorate local businesses and really create some buzz," Odoms said.